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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EC](#)  
SUBJECT: NEBOT OUTDRAWS CORREA IN COMPETING GUAYAQUIL  
MARCHES

REF: 07 GUAYAQUIL 512

Classified By: Acting Consul General Greg Chapman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Rafael Correa and Guayaquil Mayor Jaime Nebot recently convoked competing peaceful marches in Ecuador's largest city, which allowed them to measure their respective popularity. Correa's rally was highly successful, drawing a large crowd of demonstrators that the government bussed in from outside Guayaquil on January 19. However, approximately twice as many Guayaquil residents took to the streets in support of Nebot less than a week later. The mayor's rally attracted marchers from all sectors of Guayaquil society, indicating the city's poor and middle class are increasingly turned off by Correa's insults and attacks on Guayaquil institutions. Aggressively negative ads that repeatedly encouraged Guayaquil residents to stay home further tarnished the government's image in the coastal city. Nebot plans to build on his success in his hometown by marching to Montecristi again and presenting a list of Guayaquil's demands to the Constituent Assembly. Other opposition leaders supported him in the march, but as in the past, the different groups cannot seem to agree on common goals, and the alliance is flimsy. The government may be worried by Nebot's show of strength, but it still has a strong hand to play. END SUMMARY.

PAIS BUSSES THOUSANDS TO GUAYAQUIL FOR FIRST ANNIVERSARY  
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12. (C) Hoping to divert attention from protests planned by Guayaquil Mayor Jaime Nebot in response to perceived attacks on the coastal city's autonomy (Reftel), the central government organized a march in Guayaquil on January 19, ostensibly in celebration of the completion of President Rafael Correa's first year in office. The rally was entirely peaceful and drew a huge crowd. Sheylan Kow, Public Relations Officer for Guayas Governor Camilo Saman, reported to Poloff that Correa brought all of his ministers along with him for the event.

13. (C) Although local newspapers estimated that more than 80,000 people attended the rally, a contact in the Guayas Transit Commission (CTG) told Poloff the actual turnout was closer to 50,000. "The newspapers calculated the total based on aerial photographs of the main boulevard," explained David Baquerizo, Operational Coordinator of the CTG's Directive Council. "They did not account for the fact that many cars were parked on either side of the street, taking up extra space. Our calculations were based on the number and capacity of the buses that arrived in the city." Baquerizo added that the majority of the marchers came in these government-sponsored buses. "There were very few people from

Guayaquil at the march," he asserted.

#### NEBOT'S MARCH ONE WEEK LATER DRAWS DOUBLE THE CROWD

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¶4. (C) Less than a week after the government's rally, Nebot held the first in what he has promised would be a series of pro-Guayaquil, pro-autonomy demonstrations during the months of January and February. A massive swarm of Guayaquil residents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds marched down the city's main avenue on January 24 in response to the mayor's call to defend the city against Correa's attacks. Like the government's march, Nebot's gathering was completely peaceful. Ecuavisa TV reporter Ruth del Salto covered the march from a platform high above the street and estimated to Poloff that between 100,000 and 200,000 people participated. Other observers confirmed her assessment that the rally was about twice as large as the government's. Mayor Nebot later gushed to the Consul General that the huge turnout was a sign that "Correa cannot continue to insult and step on Guayaquil".

#### FOR FIRST TIME, THE POOR RALLY TO SUPPORT GUAYAQUIL MAYOR

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¶5. (C) While most of PAIS's marchers were from out of town, nearly all of the pro-Nebot crowd came from Guayaquil, including many from poorer neighborhoods where Correa has historically enjoyed high popularity. This support came even though the event organizers appear not to have offered financial incentives to marchers. A Consulate driver who attended the rally was surprised to learn that participants even had to pay for the white t-shirts that were the unofficial march uniform. Rafael Cuesta, President of Guayaquil's New Civic Junta (NJCG) and an event organizer,

confirmed that the city provided only some additional public transportation. "Guayaquil's poor participated because they are worried that they will lose the benefits and the programs that the city and the private foundations do here. When the president criticized the Charitable Junta (a highly popular private NGO that provides most of the medical care that Guayaquil's poor receive), they saw what life might be like without autonomy," he told Poloff. Patricia de Burbano, Managing Editor of Vistazo Magazine, agreed. "The city has a lot of programs for the poor, including titling of squatter properties, free books to public school students and improved health services," she said. "People believe these are in danger."

¶6. (C) Nebot's rally also drew many political moderates and first-time marchers outraged by Correa's perceived antagonism towards the coastal city and the heavy-handed government response to the failed Montecristi march. Many local Consulate staff who had never attended a political rally before participated in the pro-Nebot march. Rodolfo Barniol, an advisor to former president Gustavo Noboa, told Poloff that it was also the first time he had demonstrated for a political cause. "I was just so bothered by the clearly centralist and controlling tendencies of this government," he said.

#### PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGNS INTENSE; GOVERNMENT FIGHTS DIRTY

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¶7. (C) During the five days between the two marches, both sides engaged in a heated media campaign to influence potential marchers. Both the city and the government ran several television ads per hour in the days leading up to the January 24 march, encouraging citizens to participate and urging them to stay home, respectively. Minister of Government Fernando Bustamante also publicly warned Guayaquil residents a few days before the mayor's march that the government had information about possible violence during the demonstration. The government's aggressive (and in the case of Bustamante, apparently false) propaganda left a sour taste in the mouths of many in Guayaquil. "(Telling people to stay home) was a very questionable use of public funds," rightwing El Universo editorialist Gabriela Calderon told Poloff. "It

shows how worried the government was about this march."

#### NEBOT TO PRESS ADVANTAGE WITH ANOTHER MARCH ON MONTECRISTI -----

¶18. (C) According to New Civic Junta President Cuesta, Nebot plans to draft a "Guayaquil mandate" ) essentially a list of Guayaquil's demands for more autonomy ) and bring it to the Constituent Assembly in Montecristi as part of a second march. Although Cuesta was not able to give Poloff specific details on what would be included in the document, he said that most items related to decentralization of public services. Journalist Calderon believes that Nebot will act quickly to capitalize on the success of his rally. "I expect him to organize the march to Montecristi in the next couple of weeks," she said.

#### OPPOSITION STILL DIVIDED -----

¶19. (C) Although Guayaquil-based opposition groups came together to support the mayor during his rally, they remain far from united. PRIAN party boss Alvaro Noboa, who recently lost his Constituent Assembly seat for failing to provide a list of his financial assets, told the Consul General that he and his wife, fellow PRIAN Assembly member Anabella Azin, only showed up to appear in a few photos for his archives. "When people ask me later where I was when Guayaquil needed me, I will have evidence," he said.

¶10. (C) Cuesta and the NJCG fully supported the march but are frustrated with the mayor's plans to focus only on Guayaquil.

"Nebot is too focused on issues of municipal control. We should expand the movement to include all of Guayas (Province)," he said. "We have the support of many of the smaller towns." With that in mind, Cuesta said that he is trying to enlist the support of Fuerza Ecuador's Humberto Mata, former Ecuadorian Roldosista Party (PRE) congressman Jimmy Jairala, and Fuerza Guayas's Roberto Gilbert. "I would like to get their help in convincing Nebot to think more globally," he told Poloff. "(Barcelona Soccer Club President and A New Option (UNO) Assembly member) Eduardo Maruri has offered to act as an intermediary." Cuesta declared that his group would not support demands that did not extend to all of Guayas Province, but admitted that this would not make much

of a difference. "Nebot does not necessarily need our backing," he said.

#### NEBOT'S BIG WIN HAS GOVERNMENT WORRRIED -----

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Most observers felt that Nebot scored a huge win by both convoking a larger crowd than Correa and proving that he has the support of Guayaquil's poor, not just the privileged. The president has repeatedly accused the mayor of being a pawn of the wealthy elite, so the diverse crowd gives Nebot a key weapon in the war of words. Compounding its problems, PAIS also hurt itself tremendously with its intensely negative advertising campaign. Many politically moderate Guayaquil residents were disgusted by the heavy-handedness of the government's approach and are tiring of Correa's abrasive and insulting style. For the second time in as many months, the Correa administration has come off looking defensive and insecure about its ability to win votes in Guayaquil.

¶12. (C) Whether the opposition is able to capitalize on its victory and win the next round remains to be seen. Nebot's vision for opposing Correa does not match entirely with those of many other opposition groups, and his focus remains almost exclusively on Guayaquil equities. Nebot has said repeatedly that he does not want to run (again) for president, but he is significant as the only leader of national stature currently able to stand up to the president in a politically powerful and highly visible way. At the same time, Correa remains highly popular and seems to have convinced many other municipalities, even in the coastal region, that Guayaquil's

autonomy only draws resources away from less wealthy areas.  
PAIS still has the central government's resources at its  
disposal and a supportive majority in the Constituent  
Assembly ready to pass laws that can dilute Nebot's power.

Chapman